DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 204 SP 008 563

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TITLE Impact of the Career Opportunities Program on Curricular Innovations at Western Michigan University.
INSTITUTION Western Michigan Univ., Kalamazoo. School of Education.
PUB DATE 11 Nov 74
NOTE 16p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Career Opportunities; *Cultural Pluralism; Elementary Education; Intercultural Programs; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Language Arts; *Minority Groups; Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS *Distinguished Achievement Award Entry

ABSTRACT

One of the major concerns of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Advisory Council of the Career Opportunities Program (COP) is that traditional methods of recruitment and training are largely insufficient and leave much to be desired in quantity and quality of instructional staffs in low-income areas. As a result of discussions between the COP Project Director, the COP Advisory Council, and administrators and teaching staff from Western Michigan University, an on-site educational program was established for approximately 40 participants in Grand Rapids. This program included two interdisciplinary and intercollege experimental minors: language arts and intercultural studies. The objectives of the program were: (a) to train teachers who were better prepared than average teachers to teach language arts to ethnic minorities and (b) to help all children understand and appreciate the cultural diversities existing in the United States by providing content and experiences designed to create positive interpersonal relationships in a pluralistic society. (Included as appendixes are a breakdown of income and expenditures, extracts of opinions assessing the program, course descriptions, and a career lattice with related factors). (Author/JA)

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52

IMPACT OF THE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM ON CURRICULAR INNOVATIONS AT WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Submitted to:
The American Association of
Colleges of Teacher Education

For:
Consideration for the
Distinguished Achievement Award
of 1975

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Summary

Increasingly, criticisms are being directed toward traditional college methods of teaching future teachers and middle-class oriented content which fail to recognize the needs of economically disadvantaged children living in inner-city neighborhoods. Teacher-training institutions must begin to focus their attention on developing educational programs for future teachers that will not only make an impact on their lives, but also on students they will subsequently teach.

One of the major concerns of the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Advisory Council of the Career Opportunities Program (referred to as COP) was expressed as follows: "Traditional methods of recruitment and training are largely insufficient and have much to be desired in quantity and quality of instructional staffs in low-income areas."

As a result of frequent and lengthy discussions between the COP Project Director, COP Advisory Council and administrators and teaching staff from Western Michigan University, an on-site educational program was established for approximately 40 participants in Grand Rapids. This program included two interdisciplinary and inter-college experimental minors: (1) Language Arts, and (2) Intercultural Studies. The objectives of the program were: (1) to train teachers who were better prepared than average teachers to teach language arts to ethnic minorities and (2) to help all children understand and appreciate the cultural diversities existing in the United States, by providing content and experiences designed to create positive interpersonal relationships in a pluralistic society.

The uniqueness of this program illustrates what can be done by teaching staffs from two colleges in a university when opportunities are provided for "brainstorming" on new programs. A further extension of this uniqueness is indicated by the fact that the participants were able to complete their entire undergraduate program in Grand Rapids without ever attending on-campus classes. Moreover, it is the intent of Western Michigan University to make this experience in Grand Rapids an integral part of the on-going teacher preparation program.

IMPACT OF THE CAREER OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM
ON CURRICULAR INNOVATIONS AT WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Since the appearance of Riessman and Pearls' book, New Careers for the Poor (1965)[1], a variety of programs have been funded first under the Scheuer Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act, and more recently under the Model Cities programs. According to Bennett and Falk (1970)[2], "The new careers concept emphasizes the way in which school aides can be (1) a bridge between the middle class institution and the community or minority group, (2) a new way of recruiting the poor, the Black, or the disadvantaged into teaching, and (3) a new form of personal opportunity for individual members of these groups." Within these general goals and following federal guidelines, an educational career lattice[3] system was established in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. It was now possible for a participant entering the Career Opportunities Program (COP) to remain on a particular step, or to continue until the baccalaureate degree and full teacher certification were achieved.

Credence was given to the COP as a catalytic force in influencing educational change by President Gerald R. Ford, then a U. S. Representative, to a group of COP participants in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1971. His remarks were as follows:

> "It is my general impression that COP can have as great an impact on the educational system -- the way we teach teachers, the way we grade teachers, the way we instruct students -- as any program in the educational process at the present time. As I understand it, no program has done more to break down image barriers.... COP may well have the impact of forcing a new look at teaching methods. I don't think we should freeze ourselves into teaching methods just because we did it the same way twenty years ago."[4]

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[1] Frank Riessman and Arthur Pearl (eds.). New Careers for the Poor. New York: The Free Press, 1965.

[2] William S. Bennett, Jr., and R. Frank Falk. New Careers and Urban Schools. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970.

[3] See Appendix D.

[4] Impact - A newsletter of Career Opportunities' Leadership Training Institute. Vol. 1, No. 3, October, 1971. Washington, D.C.

Approximately 40 teacher aides were selected from the Grand Rapids School System to participate in this experimental program. Of those selected, 80 percent had completed high school, 10 percent had some college training, while the remaining 10 percent had some high school education. Most of the participants were married women with families. The majority were Black, with a few Chicanos and low socioeconomic whites. Their ages ranged from the mid-twenties to the early fifties.

After several meetings between representatives from Western Michigan University and the Project Director for the Grand Rapids COP and its Advisory Council, Western was selected to prepare a challenging educational program that was to become a landmark for both the University and the COP. As an alternative to students taking coursework on campus, the COP participants were provided an on-site undergraduate program by Western Michigan University in Grand Rapids. This action made it more feasible for the participants to continue to work half-days as teacher-aides and attend classes in the afternoons and evenings.

In addition to an already established Elementary Education minor, the COP Advisory Council recommended that Western Michigan University provide a Cross-Cultural minor and a Language Arts minor to its participants. Since the Language Arts minor was to be developed as a new minor, consideration was given to the current Comparative/Cross-Cultural minor which focussed its emphasis on the cultures of foreign nations. What was really needed was a minor that dealt with the cultural diversities found in the United States. According to comments made by members of the Advisory Council, "Children should be taught about their true cultural heritage and the richness of other cultures. Furthermore, children were not learning basic reading and writing skills, nor were teachers prepared to cope with minority dialects and special problems of children from bilingual and bicultural backgrounds."

Two major challenges presented to Western Michigan University by COP were: (1) to provide innovative and viable educational programs for the participants in Grand Rapids, and (2) to strengthen on-campus teacher training programs as a result of its experiences with this program. As a consequence of dialogue conducted between the COP Advisory Council and members of Western's teaching staff, an Intercultural Studies minor was established as a variant of the presently existing Comparative/Cross-Cultural Studies minor offered through the Institute of International and Area Studies.

The general objectives of the program were: (1) to train teachers who were better prepared than average teachers to teach language arts to ethnic minorities and (2) to help all children understand and appreciate the cultural diversities existing in the United States, by providing content and experiences designed to create positive interpersonal relationships in a pluralistic society.

Both Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Education agreed that normal course designations and credit assignments could be modified to the extent that faculty planning groups need not feel constrained to think of courses either in terms of combining present courses or in designing new courses bearing the traditional format. Furthermore, questions pertaining to goals and means for achieving them were to be approached with full recognition that inter-disciplinary and inter-college innovative arrangements for training teachers were of paramount importance. In order to make it possible for interested faculty to work cooperatively with one another in developing an innovative program, and also to avoid the pitfalls of "vested-interest" concerns, the new offerings were designated as University courses.

Moreover, in the earlier planning stages of Western's participation in this program, the College of Education had accepted 18 hours of education

courses and practicums taken at Grand Rapids Junior College in lieu of courses the participants would normally have been required to take if they had attended classes on campus at Western Michigan University. In addition, all developmental courses taken at Grand Rapids Junior College were accepted by Western upon negotiations with the Departments of English, Psychology, and General Studies.

A professor of Teacher Education was appointed coordinator to serve as a liaison person for the project, while an associate professor of English was appointed to serve as chairperson for the Language Arts group consisting of faculty from the Communication Arts, English, Linguistics, and Teacher Education Departments. The Director of the Institute of International and Area Studies and the Associate Dean of Social Sciences co-chaired the Intercultural Studies minor which brought together members from the Departments of Anthropology, Geography, History, Political Science, Sociology and Teacher Education.

Not only were both groups excited about the challenge of initiating a course of action, they were also aware of the need to keep in mind the rationale set forth by the COP Advisory Council, i.e., "the co-designing and implementation of the two new minors based on the belief that there was a special need for a specific content, methodology and generation of attitudes and expectations if teacher-training institutions were to effectively train the kinds of individuals needed to work in urban settings in general, and in low-income environs in particular."

Since the Language Arts minor was scheduled to be presented to the COP participants in the Fall of 1972 at Grand Rapids, the ten faculty members, who had been involved in preplanning sessions, were now brought together in a series of half-day seminars. These seminars were supported by development

funds from the College of Arts and Sciences (see Appendix A). Ideas were shared on how they could best achieve their goals. This proved to be a highly constructive experience for the seminar group, since they were able to share their own specializations in a manner which tied the entire program together.

Meanwhile, the College of Education initiated action to have both the Language Arts and Intercultural Studies minors approved by the State Board of Education for teacher certification. Concurrently, the Dean of the Division of Continuing Education at Western completed contractual negotiations with the COP Advisory Council on matters pertaining to salaries for teaching staff, travel, energy increments, consultant fees, books and materials, and administrative costs (see Appendix A).

The Language Arts minor was finally launched in the Fall of 1972, and was presented in two consecutive semesters as a coordinated program insofar as this could be effected through advance planning and coordinated teaching. The participants were required to take a 12-hour block of the Language Arts minor each semester for two consecutive semesters, to be followed by the Intercultural Studies minor in the Spring of 1973.

The first semester of the Language Arts minor focussed on Language and Reading; involving the studying of the structure of English in contrast to the structure of minority dialects; showing prospective teachers how to distinguish between dialect differences and genuine reading problems; and finally, diagnosing and remediation of reading problems. The emphasis for the second semester was primarily on literature and speech with particular focus on minority literature of children, oral interpretation of children's literature, creative writing, drama, film making and classroom visitations. Formal descriptions for each component of the program are listed in Appendix C.

Similarly, in moving beyond the preliminary stages of developing course content and objectives for the Intercultural Studies minor, several half-day seminar sessions were also conducted by members of this group beginning in December, 1972. The course titles and a brief description of each are listed in Appendix C. "The emphasis was again upon helping the students (prospective elementary teachers) bridge the gap between the sub-cultures of the American urban scene and the dominant middle class culture without depreciating either."[5]

Having graduated from Grand Rapids Junior College, the COP participants, upon completing the two innovative minors, began their student teaching assignments. These assignments were followed by full-time teaching internships and subsequently led to baccalaureate degrees. Fifteen COP participants graduated from Western Michigan University in August, 1974; five of this number graduating with honors. Since a second group of participants is in the process of completing both minors by 1975, no evaluations have been made concerning their reactions to the program. A rather extensive evaluation[6] of the entire program, supported by College of Education funds, has been made on the reactions of staff and students in the first group which completed both minors (see Appendix B).

As a result of its successful experience with the COP, Western Michigan University is presently developing the Language Arts minor for an on-campus presentation in the near future. Likewise, careful consideration is being given to the expansion of the program by exploring the possibility of contractual arrangements with other school districts.

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[5] Cornelius Loew and Leo Stine. "Developing New Programs for Teachers Preparing Through Continuing Education." The New Campus, AFSTE, Vol. XXVII, Spring, 1974, 28-30.

[6] Uldis Smidchens. Evaluation Report of the Intercultural and Language Arts Minors Associated with the Career Opportunities Program in Grand Rapids, June, 1974.

Appendix A

Income and Expenditures, Fall, 1972 through Spring, 1975

Sources of Income

Career Opportunities Program of the Grand Rapids Board of Education	$102,687.70
College of Arts & Sciences Western Michigan University	5,200.00
College of Education Western Michigan University	700.00
	$108,587.70

Expenditures

Instructors Fee	55,250.00
Energy Increment @ 10¢ per mile	7,344.00
Fringe Benefits 15% of fees and energy increment	12,518.80
Travel @ 12¢ per mile	8,812.00
Meals	3,740.00
University Expenses	15,022.90
Professional In-Service Training	5,900.00
Language Arts Minor, 1972 10 instructors totaling $3,250	
Intercultural Studies Minor, 1973 8 instructors totaling $1,950	
Evaluation of Career Opportunities Program Totaling $700	
TOTAL	$108,587.70

Appendix B

Responses to the following questions, highlighting the evaluation, were extracted verbatim from the assessment of the program.

What process is being used to make curriculum and administrative decisions in this project?

....Overall planning of objectives for the minors, however, must be considered to be a joint project involving a large share of WMU faculty. As can be seen from Dr. Govatos' report (See Appendix), several months of pre-implementation planning sessions were conducted for the purpose of establishing general and specific objectives for the two minors.

All faculty members involved in the instruction of courses within the two minors indicated that specific course objectives had been developed and, reportedly, these objectives are available for students and faculty to examine.

Over half of the respondents to the faculty questionnaire also reported that the objectives have been modified, at least to some degree, to better meet the needs of the individuals within the COP program. In summary, planning does appear evident for both the pre-implementation and the post-implementation phase of the project, but, some concern might be warranted in terms of the lack of total faculty involvement in the post-implementation phases of the planning.

What is the nature of the documentation which identifies the purposes of the project?

Documentation was found to be readily available. (See the Proposals for the Intercultural Minor and the Language Arts Minor, and Lou Govatos' summary of pre-implementation planning.) Also available, and of interest to this evaluation would be the research report of Bennett (1973).

How much staff time has been devoted to the two minors?

Relative to staff involvement in COP, and cost of the program in terms of faculty time, responses by the students to interviews indicate that the perceptions of these students toward staff involvement must be considered to be extremely positive. The majority of subjects interviewed indicated that they were impressed by the deep professional commitments on the part of the faculty and visitations to the work setting (school) and other extra conference time was provided and appreciated.

What are the faculty and student perceptions of the two minors?

....In response to questions relative to the usefulness and importance of the Language Arts minor, approximately three-fourths of the COP participants responded with statements of a very positive nature. The students

found the courses within the minor of extreme value in working with their public school students. Despite this overwhelmingly positive image, however, some students suggested that the course content and instructional techniques might be expanded to include the essential learnings for dealing with a larger age span of public school students.

The Intercultural Minor was perceived by most participants in the same positive view. Positive statements included such comments as: "It has helped me learn about others", "It forced me to examine myself in terms of how I react to others", and "It has enabled me to understand the relationship between culture and behavior."

....Among the more positive faculty statements were numerous citations concerning the usefulness of the two minors in initiating awareness of intercultural differences, the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach and the cooperation among departments, the value derived from the emphasis on understanding different cultures and behaviors, and the strong belief that the emphasis on urban life and its unique problems must be dealt with.

What suggestions for modification of the COP program do faculty and students have?

Suggestions for the modification of the COP program based on the student interviews, were directed toward two dimensions: (1) Instructional techniques and (2) Course content.

Concerning instructional techniques, a large proportion of the students expressed a preference toward directing instructional techniques to the practice and theory of classroom methods, methods of dealing with discipline problems, and involvement with a larger number of teacher-related problems. Participants working in the upper elementary grades suggested that more emphasis should be placed upon this age group and most COP participants, although indicating that attendance of classes on campus would be difficult or impossible, suggested that more effort should be made to establish contact between the COP students and other teacher education candidates on campus.

Frequency of student responses regarding evaluation of the individual faculty member evaluations would suggest that the majority of students appreciate the performance based teacher methods employed by some of the instructors.... Course content, as perceived by the students, was rated extremely high with some slight concern expressed by some toward the non-utilitarian nature of some of the instructional objectives. Some participants, especially those who were observed as experiencing some difficulty in the classroom, suggested that more attention might be placed upon examining the specific problems and discussing the teacher's role in working toward the solution of these problems.

Faculty suggestions for program modification, as reflected in their response to items #13, 16, 17, and 22 were directed toward the more precise definition of course and program objectives, improve coordination between various departments, better integration among courses, development of more innovative programs to better meet the individual needs of the COP participants, elimination of departmental and college politics in the administration

of the program, and more opportunity for released time to work directly with the COP students in the school setting.

Additional Information Received From COP Students

In addition to items directly related to the questions listed above, the in-depth interviews were designed to assess the students' evaluations of faculty member performance, faculty member interest in the program, and overall enjoyment and appreciation of the COP program by the students involved.

With only very few exceptions, students rated all faculty members as being interested, fair, knowledgeable, and well-informed. Although each COP participant was requested to identify the faculty member who, in their opinion, did the most outstanding job of instruction, most participants were unable or unwilling to make such a distinction. Instead, many of the faculty members were cited as being "top caliber", and only a very few were identified by students as being "less than outstanding."

Qualities seen as contributing to the high rating of faculty were organizational skills, interest, willingness to share materials and time, ability to listen and understand, class structure, and fairness in grading.

Additional Information Received From COP Faculty

Faculty comments relative to the caliber of students enrolled in the COP program were generally favorable with the following concerns expressed:

(1) Approximately 10% lacked the necessary reading and writing skills which were identified as a prerequisite.
(2) Wide range of intellectual and cultural background led to difficulties in teaching entire groups.
(3) Some students were seen as having difficulty seeing the relevancy of some of the program offerings and objectives.
(4) Lack of basic knowledge in Sociology and/or Social Work.

Seen as essential for future COP participants were: reading skills, writing skills, interest, ability to meet regular admissions standards, ability to relate theory to practice, and interpersonal skills and experiences.

Only those specific recommendations which related to faculty and student responses to the minors are included in the following comments:

1. Inter- and intra-departmental cooperation and planning for the two minors must be increased.
2. Modification of teaching methods and the inclusion of performance-based objectives must be considered in any attempt to meet the specific needs of the COP participants.
3. Western Michigan University, based upon the success of the COP, should give careful consideration to the expansion of the program to include contractual arrangements with other school districts.

Appendix C

Fall Semester - 1972

Language Arts I, 12 Hours[1]
(Language and Reading)

The English Language and the Reading Process

A study of the insights of psycholinguistics as they apply to the process of reading English, with particular focus on the manner in which sentence structure affects readability.

American Dialects

A study of regional, social, and stylistic variations among American dialects, with emphasis on the dialects of minority ethnic groups. Particular attention will be paid to the problems involved in teaching minority dialect speakers to read, and to speak Standard English.

Reading Workshop

The basic purpose of the workshop will be to study typical classroom reading problems. Students will examine and experiment with methods and techniques used in teaching reading and with various tools used in identifying reading problems. Particular attention will be paid to the reading problems of minority ethnic groups.

Winter Semester - 1973

Language Arts II, 12 Hours
(Literature, Speech, Writing, Drama, and Film)

Readings in Minority Literature

A study of recurrent themes in contemporary minority literature, focusing on the literature of Afro-Americans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and American Indians. Attention will be paid to both adult and children's literature.

Oral Interpretation

Emphasis will be placed on developing the student's appreciation of literature and his skill in analysis and oral reading of prose, poetry and drama. Particular attention will be paid to the oral interpretation of children's literature.

Seminar in Teaching the Language Arts

An exploration of the problems, materials, and techniques of teaching practical, critical, and creative aspects of oral, written, and image communication. Synthesizing writing, dramatization, film composition and classroom visitations. The course will be coordinated and taught by faculty from the Departments of Communication Arts, English and Teacher Education.

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[1] Proposal for a Language Arts minor for the Career Opportunities Program in Grand Rapids.

Appendix C

Intercultural Studies Minor[2]

Spring Session - 1973

The Cultural Dimension: Blue Print For Living

The cultural dimension is designed to introduce the student to the nature of the American culture and its significance in understanding various group decisions within our pluralistic society.

Our Human Habitat

Through his long existence, man has always had to cope with his physical and cultural environment. These forces have often played an important role in population distribution and in other forms and patterns of human-physical existence. Hence, emphasis is placed on the ecological structure of urban areas and the demographic characteristics in the inner-city schools.

Social Studies Teaching Methods For Culturally Different Children

The elementary school should be committed to a rational process, i.e., knowledge, evidence, reason, and relevancy. The elementary program should also rest upon a strong belief in the inherent worth of the individual. The strategies of knowledge, thinking and social action will enable the individual to become an active participant in the process of social change.

Summer Session - 1973

Myths, Ritual and Meaning in Race Relationships

Cultures and institutions develop a raison d'etre to justify their existence. The success of cultures and institutions in meeting the basic needs of people will often be dependent upon the existence of congruence between their ideological justification as found in the myths, ritual, values and meanings and what is in existence in terms of practices and social structures.

The City and Community

In a study of the city and community, the whole panorama of human social problems unfold. Accordingly, a few crucial and major topics, dealing with the influence of cities on human conditions, characteristics of slums, urban decentralization, welfare in the modern community, and population mobility by social classes, etc.

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[2] Proposal for an Intercultural Studies Group Minor for the Career Opportunities Program in Grand Rapids.

Fall Session - 1973

The Political Man

This course has relevance for understanding man's political life and activities, for gaining expertise in manipulating the system in the interest of amelioration and for minimizing some of the fantastic social problems now plaguing American cities. Man is studied as a political being and an agent of social change, with emphasis being placed on men living in diversified, urbanized, and pluralistic environments.

Winter Session - 1974

Seminar in Teaching Social Studies

A staff of social scientists will share their thinking concerning significant ideas and concepts from their disciplines with the participants. Implementation of social studies methods and skills in actual classroom situations will be applied by the participants.

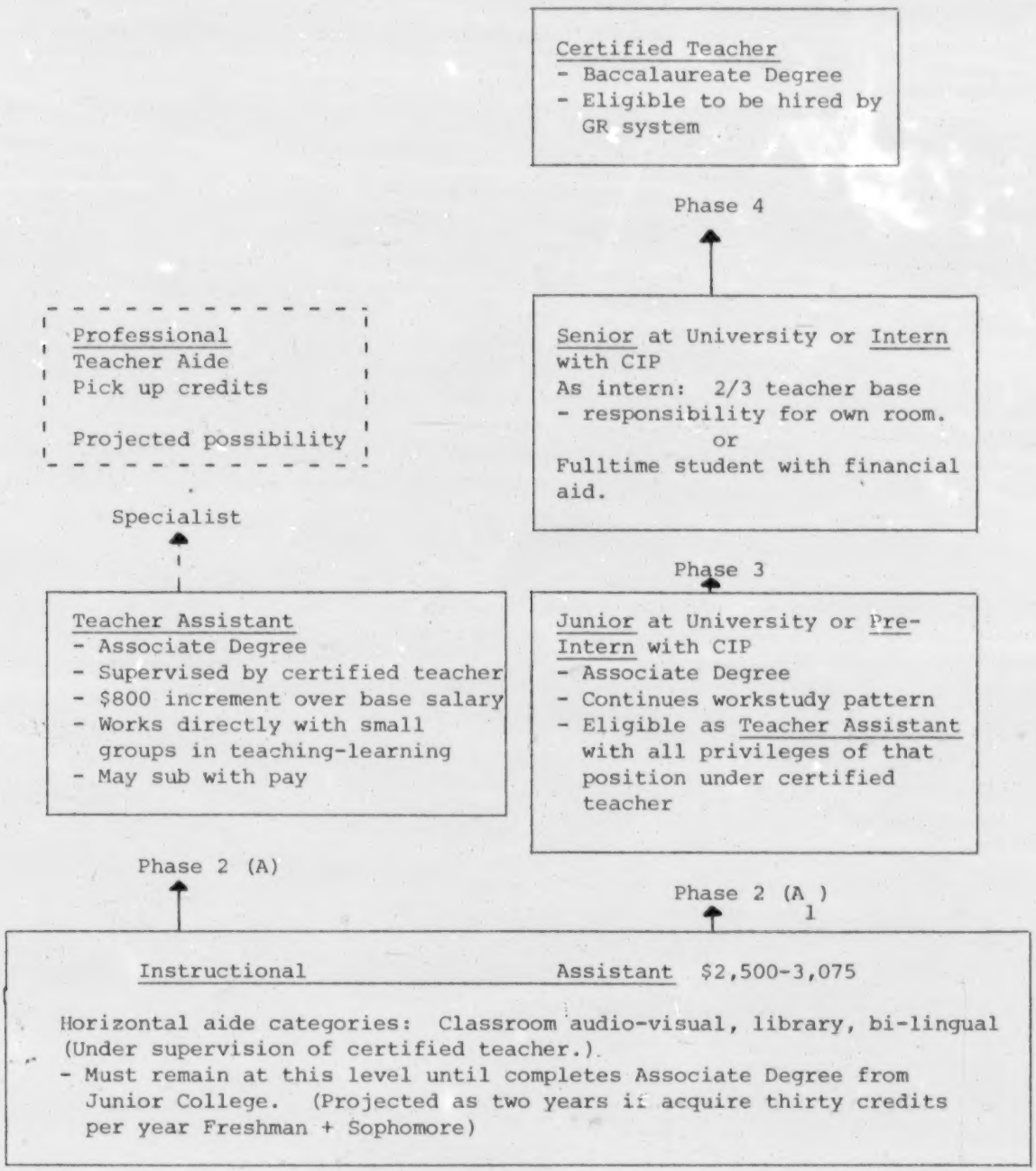
Spring Session - 1974

The Economics of Exploitation

Discrimination and economic deprivation are widespread occurences in American Society. The spin-off effects in terms of behaviors and social characteristics have served to make real the "self-fulfilling prophecy." This course is designed to analyze some of the economic consequences of exploitation as these relate to minority and low income groups.

Appendix D

TABLE 1
CAREER LATTICE WITH RELATED FACTORS
(Subject to refinement through proposed system-wide career lattice)


Certified Teacher
- Baccalaureate Degree
- Eligible to be hired by GR system
Phase 4
Professional
Teacher Aide
Pick up credits
Projected possibility
Senior at University or Intern with CIP
As intern: 2/3 teacher base
- responsibility for own room.
or
Fulltime student with financial aid.
Specialist
Phase 3
Teacher Assistant
- Associate Degree
- Supervised by certified teacher
- $800 increment over base salary
- Works directly with small groups in teaching-learning
- May sub with pay
Junior at University or Pre-Intern with CIP
- Associate Degree
- Continues workstudy pattern
- Eligible as Teacher Assistant with all privileges of that position under certified teacher
Phase 2 (A)
Phase 2 (A 1)
Instructional Assistant $2,500-3,075
Horizontal aide categories: Classroom audio-visual, library, bi-lingual
(Under supervision of certified teacher.)
- Must remain at this level until completes Associate Degree from Junior College. (Projected as two years if acquire thirty credits per year Freshman + Sophomore)

Phase 1